

# BLUE & C - PERSONALITY TRAITS OF LEADERS\*

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## Abstract

School superintendents and school leaders can be most effective if they understand their personality traits and the traits of those they learn and work with. A school leader can maximize their effectiveness by examining their own behaviors, thinking and habits as well as recognizing the behaviors of others. The DISC Pure Behavioral styles and the True Colors Inventory are two types of personality indicators that can be used to identify decision making behaviors, motivators and limitations. This publication aligns with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC) Standard 4: "An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources."



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## 1 Introduction

School superintendents and school leaders can be most effective if they understand their personality traits and the traits of those they learn and work with. A school leader can maximize their effectiveness by examining their own behaviors, thinking and habits as well as recognizing the behaviors of others. The DISC Pure Behavioral styles and the True Colors Inventory are two types of personality indicators that can be used to identify decision making behaviors, motivators and limitations. The history of the DISC and the connections that the True Colors Inventory makes to personality and leadership are quite interesting.

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Identifying and understanding the personality traits of the DISC and the True Colors is an important skill for a school superintendent or school leader. By understanding the two styles and the perceptions of others, school superintendents will better understand how to create successful teams and a more effective school environment.

## 2 A Brief History of Personality Indicators

The ancient Greeks were among the first to identify personality types which were based upon the beliefs that the body consisted of four major liquids the Greeks called humours (moods). Humours were based on the four elements of fire, air, water and earth. When one liquid became more dominant over the other liquids, the person's mood or personality was said to change. The four humours were blood, yellow bile, phlegm and black bile. (The History of Disc) If a person had too much of one liquid, a different personality type would become more apparent. An excess of blood made a person sanguine or confident and optimistic. Yellow bile resulted in a person with a choleric personality or one that is easily irritated or angered. Too much phlegm created a personality that showed apathy or was unconcerned. Black bile meant melancholia or someone that has a sad or depressing personality. (The History of Disc) For a school leader or superintendent, knowing the personality type of co-workers, team leaders and assistants is just as important now as it was to the Greeks in understanding why people behave in various ways.

Like the Greeks, many researchers have identified personality types and categorized the types into four areas. The chart below shows a comparison of four dimension personality instruments designed by five different researchers. (A Comparison of Four Dimension Personality Instruments).

Table 1.1

A Comparison of Four Dimension Personality Instruments				
William M. MarstonDISC	Dominance	Influence	Steadiness	Compliance
Carl Jung	Sensing	Intuitive	Feeling	Thinking
Hippocrates /Greeks	Choleric/ Yellow Bile	Sanguine / Blood	Phlegmatic / Phlegm	Melancholic / Black Bile
Don LowryTrue Colors	Green	Orange	Gold	Blue
Smalley/Trent	Lion	Otter	Golden Retriever	Beaver

**Table 1**

Mirroring the four humours of the Greeks, William M. Marston developed a theory to explain emotional responses which he placed in the following four factors: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance. These four factors became the DISC personality test which is one of the most widely used personality tests. (The History of Disc) Carl Jung was another influential psychologist that defined personalities into four different types: Extraverted or introverted, sensing or intuitive, feeling or thinking, judging or perceiving. Jung believed that human behavior was not random but predictable. Out of Jung's research was the beginning of the Myers Briggs Inventory – the MBI is used to identify how people perceive the world and make decisions. (<http://www.myersbriggstypeindicator.co.uk/><sup>2</sup>) The Myers Briggs Type Indicator is a popular personality inventory used in businesses.

Another personality indicator that was developed with four indicators is the Smalley and Trent test. Gary Smalley chose four animals that described the four personality traits much like the four indicators in the DISC. The Lion likes to lead, is goal oriented and a good decision maker. The Otter loves people, is

<sup>2</sup><http://www.myersbriggstypeindicator.co.uk/>

influencing and likes to motivate people. The Golden Retriever is sensitive, loyal and steady. The Beaver is organized and creative. (Smalley & Trent) Many businesses use the Smalley and Trent as an interview question: Of the four animals, lion, otter, golden retriever and beaver which one would best describe you? The interviewer is trying to determine personality type of the candidate.

Like the animal test, the True Colors Inventory identifies four colors that represent corresponding personality types. Oranges are social and optimistic, Greens are analytical thinkers and inventive. Blues are personal and compassionate and Gold's are organized, prepared and spiritual. (Lowry) True Colors can also be used as an interview question or can be given to individuals or teams. The SJSD administrative team took the true colors test and then grouped according to colors and tried to answer an in-basket scenario. It was interesting as a Gold working with only Gold's how difficult it was to decide who would lead the discussion because all of us wanted to be in charge. The Bode staff also used the True Colors test and grouped according to interdisciplinary teams to see if they had at least one color on each team. The teams then discussed the behaviors of each color and how people perceived each personality type. Using the True Colors test in both situations was a great learning experience and very useful as a leader. Each or any of the five types of personality tests can assist leaders in identifying strengths and weaknesses for themselves and the teams they work with.

Focusing on the DISC "C" and the True Colors "Blue" traits, a comparison will be made of the personality traits on the importance of the superintendent or school leader. The DISC is divided into four categories: Dominance, Influencing, Steadiness and Compliance. Vice President Al Gore and Tennis Pro Chris Evert are among the 0.3% of the population that are considered "high C" according to the DISC. Analytical, methodical, precise, diplomatic and accurate describe a "high C". High C's are "by the book" people that need procedures and pay close attention to details. A "high C" can be identified by observing a perfectly organized office or an avoidance of conflict. "High C's" would be valuable to a team because they ask the right questions, pay close attention to detail and are extremely diplomatic. "High C's" tend to be overly critical of self and defensive. (Pure Behavior Styles, 1993) The need for a superintendent or school leader to be a "high C" or include a "high C" on a team is vital. An accountant or finance person with a "high C" personality type would be an excellent hire for a superintendent.

The True Colors personality inventory was developed by Don Lowry. True Colors uses four colors to describe personality types: Orange-social, Greens-analytical, Blues-compassionate and Gold-organized. People with the "blue" color trait are described as being "interactive." They relate well in groups of people but are sensitive to people's feeling. Blues like to nurture other's potential and expect people to develop their own potential. They enjoy unity and harmony for all; possessing a strong spirituality. Others may perceive blues as overly emotional, weird, naïve and easy to manipulate. (Lowry) For a school leader, it is important to understand which color best describes the personality traits exhibited and the perceptions that others have of that personality trait. A school superintendent that hires an assistant director or director of counseling with a "blue" personality type would be a significant find to the leadership team. A superintendent that has a "blue" personality would definitely need to surround themselves with a green and lots of people with gold personality types.

A "high C" on the DISC would compare to a "green" on the True Colors Inventory likewise a "blue" on the True Colors would compare with a "high S" on the DISC. Neither "high C" & "green" nor "high S" and "blue" are compatible with the other but both hold characteristics that are essential to the inner workings of a team. If a superintendent had the "high C" personality trait, they may be highly successful because they are detail oriented, diplomatic, have a need for procedures and ask the difficult questions. If a superintendent had the "blue" personality trait, they may also be highly successful because they are best when working with people and like to nurture and grow the potential in others. Both the "high C" and the "blue" personality types have characteristics that would be valuable for an effective superintendent or for members of a leadership team.

### 3 Implications for School Leaders

As a superintendent or school leader, understanding personalities and hiring accordingly can create a high performing team. “Getting the right people on the bus” is an important step for a superintendent or school leader. (Collins, 2001) When a school leader or members of the team accept their own personality styles then they can begin to recognize and adjust to the personality types of those they work and learn with. Realizing that a variety of personality styles makes up an effective team, the superintendent can hire and place team members accordingly. “Once leaders have gained an understanding into their personal thinking and leadership styles, they need to hire and interact regularly with people whose thinking styles are very different from their own.” (Sousa, David A, 2003, pp. 275-276) Having team members that do not all think alike is healthy for a team. Questioning, analyzing and probing issues is the work of a team; it would be too easy and non-productive if everyone agreed all the time.

Today, the demands that are placed on principals, district leaders and superintendents are incredible. With NCLB, state mandates and local community issues, changing demographics, an increase in diversity and lack of job security, the high demand on school leaders is taking a toll. Turnover and burnout is increasing and the hiring pool for highly qualified candidates is thinning. Superintendents and school districts need to place priorities on learning, recruiting highly qualified staff and training and developing leaders from within. As the role of a superintendent changes from one of district manager of systems to lead learner of instruction so do the roles of the district leaders that a superintendent needs. A superintendent with a “high C” personality would be most effective if surrounded by a couple of “high D’s”, a high I” and a high E” to compliment strengths and weaknesses. A superintendent with a “blue” personality would need an assistant that is green and lots of worker bees that are gold with a few orange thrown in to be a highly effective and successful school district leadership team. Understanding personalities to create a high performing, effective team is an essential skill for a superintendent.

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